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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this paper is to help higher education institutions determine how well their institutional effectiveness models match the North Central Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Institutions of Higher Education Criterion Four requirements. The paper describes each of the major requirements as a domain in a matrix with cross-related subcategories. The matrix is built around six issues: (1) activities to be measured need to be established, (2) perspectives of the constituencies and related criteria need to be identified, (3) the level of analysis should be dependent on constituent perspectives and expectations, (4) the time frame determines how data are measured, (5) the types of data needed are related to perspectives and levels of analysis, and (6) the referent used to assess indicators is determined by the dominant constituency. The paper suggests that institutions use this matrix to assess the degree to which their institutions match the elements required in Criterion Four, and also to identify strengths and areas for improvement. (Contains 30 references.) (CH)

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Running head: INSTITUTIONAL EFFECTIVENESS MATRIX

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Institutional Effectiveness Matrix of Domains: Comparing the Requirements of North Central Association's Criterion Four With Your Institution

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Institutional Effectiveness Matrix of Domains: Comparing the Requirements of North Central Association's Criterion Four With Your Institution

Abstract

Considering current federal, regional, and state policies, it is important for institutions under the 19-state purview of the North Central Association of Colleges and Schools, Commission on Institutions of Higher Education (NCA) to understand more clearly the NCA's requirements for demonstrating assessment of "institutional effectiveness" as stated in Criterion Four. The purpose of this paper is to help institutions of higher education determine how well their institutional effectiveness models match the NCA's requirements that are found in its Criterion Four to demonstrate effectiveness. Using the six issues of Cameron (1980) as a conceptual framework for assessing institutional effectiveness, the Matrix of Domains is derived from analyzing and categorizing the elements of Criterion Four and related General Institutional Requirements (GIRs). The paper describes each of the major requirements as a domain of the matrix with sub-categories, which are cross-related in some areas. The existence of gaps or varying degrees of matching between NCA's domains of activity and an institution's has implications for an institution completing its self-study process. An institution may need to determine whether certain domains of activity rank differently in importance with NCA or the existence of varying degrees of match in the elements are acceptable.

Introduction and Perspectives

Assessing institutional effectiveness has become a major issue in higher and postsecondary education. Regulatory entities at the federal, regional, and state levels have formulated policies and procedures for assessing "institutional effectiveness" and "student outcomes." Many of these entities have described "institutional effectiveness" as assessing the effectiveness of institutions in terms of achievement of their missions and goals (Commission on Higher Education, Middle States Association of Colleges and Schools [MSA], 1996; Council on Postsecondary Accreditation [COPA], 1992; Ewell, 1992; Ewell & Boyer, 1988; McLeod & Atwell, 1992; North Central Association of Colleges and Schools, Commission on Institutions of Higher Education [NCA], 1991, 1997; U.S. Department of Education [USDE], 1994; Wolff, 1992). It is no longer a question of "Why do we assess effectiveness," but, "How do we assess effectiveness?"

On the regional level, all accrediting agencies have incorporated institutional effectiveness into their criteria for evaluating their institutions (Hudgins, 1993; Losak, 1987). For example, the 19-state North Central Association (NCA) established five criteria upon which to evaluate member institutions for accreditation (purposes, organization, accomplishment of educational purposes, strengthening educational effectiveness, and integrity) (NCA, 1997). Having moved beyond the emphasis of "inputs," (number of volumes in the library, number of faculty and their degrees, etc.), all six regional accrediting agencies require institutions to assess the processes involved in instruction and student support (Hogan, 1992; Simmons, 1993). They have identified the other components of effectiveness models, including outputs and outcomes (Nettles, 1987).

These agencies have also included student outcomes assessment as a part of assessing outputs in evaluating overall institutional effectiveness (MSA, 1996; NCA, 1991; 1997). The Commission on Higher Education, Middle States Association of Colleges and Schools (MSA) further expects to see an institutional research structure and data base to support these assessment functions (MSA, 1996). North Central Association requires its institutions to assess overall institutional effectiveness (Criterion Four) and student academic achievement (Criterion Three). In recent publications, NCA indicates a stronger emphasis on assessing student academic achievement by requiring this assessment plan and program to function as an independent component, yet linked to the overall model for assessing institutional effectiveness (Lopez, 1996; NCA, 1996, 1997).

Purpose

The purpose of this paper is to examine the elements required in NCA's Criterion Four and provide a Matrix of Domains (and related areas of activities) in order to help the institution determine the degree to which it matches these elements. Comparing the Matrix of Domains to an institution's institutional effectiveness model should help determine whether there are any significant information/data gaps that, among other factors, might prevent the institution from meeting NCA's requirements.

In Criterion Four the North Central Association requires assessment of institutional effectiveness, "The institution can continue to accomplish its purposes and strengthen its educational effectiveness" (NCA, 1997, p. 52). This criterion comprises NCA definitions of phrases, such as "educational effectiveness," the role of institutional planning in meeting the criterion, the expectation that other criteria have been

previously met, and establishing patterns of evidence, including the establishment of "structured assessment processes" (NCA, 1997, p. 53). In addition to these elements in Criterion Four, the first domain of the Matrix of Domains includes five categories (Mission, Governance, Faculty, Educational Program, and Finances) involving 6 of the 24 General Institutional Requirements (GIRs) that directly relate to the previously stated elements of Criterion Four: (1) Mission Statement, (2) Executive Officer Providing Leadership, (3) Significant Role of Faculty in Developing and Evaluating All Educational Programs, (4) Degree Programs Compatible with Institution's Mission, (5) Institution's Appropriate Use of Resources to Support Programs, and (6) Practices that Demonstrate "Fiscal Viability" (NCA, 1997).

Conceptual Framework

There are overlapping issues and questions among the different frameworks for assessing institutional effectiveness (Cameron, 1978, 1980; Cameron & Smart, 1998; Goodman & Pennings, 1980; R. A. Scott, 1984; W. R. Scott, 1977; Seashore, 1983). Goodman and Pennings (1977) developed six issues as a means of assessing the effectiveness of an institution. They and others (Cameron, 1978; Etzioni, 1964; Nadler & Tushman, 1980) have also identified organizational models established to assess institutional effectiveness. Cameron (1980) cogently addresses and consolidates these issues. Cameron's six issues that must be addressed in assessing effectiveness are the following: (1) The domain of activity to be measured needs to be established. (2) The constituencies' perspectives and related criteria need to be identified. (3) The level of analysis to be used is dependent on constituent perspectives and expectations. (4) The time frame involved determines how data is measured. (5) The types of data

needed are related to perspectives and levels of analysis. (6) The referent to be used by which to assess indicators is determined by the dominant constituency. These six issues establish the framework from which to analyze North Central Association's Criterion Four and related six GIRs and to construct the Matrix of Domains and areas of activities.

Approach

This paper applies these six issues of Cameron (1980) to the elements found in Criterion Four and the General Institutional Requirements GIRs and demonstrates that the Matrix incorporates the Domains of activities (issue 1) resulting from the perspective and criteria (issue 2) of NCA found in Criterion Four and the related GIRs. From these domains and perspectives and criteria, institutions should use the organizational level of analysis (issue 3) in a static and/or longitudinal time frame (issue 4) to compare the types of data (issue 5) required by NCA as the normative referent (issue 6).

(1) The domain of activity to be measured needs to be established. In this context, domains are similar to missions (Cameron & Whetten, 1983). They need to be defined with a set of criteria by which to be assessed (Goodman & Pennings, 1977). The Domains in this Matrix have been defined by the guidelines suggested by NCA. The missions stated in the colleges' institutional effectiveness models need to be compared to NCA guidelines related to missions.

(2) The constituencies' perspectives and related criteria need to be identified. Identifying the constituency clarifies the values used to assess the criteria (Goodman & Pennings, 1977). The external constituency (in this case, NCA) and the internal constituency (the institution) share the same criteria to be used in the self-evaluation

process. This Matrix of Domains incorporates the suggested guidelines in Criterion Four and the related General Institutional Requirements (GIRs) of NCA as a basis from which each institution can assess the elements of its institutional effectiveness model.

(3) The level of analysis to be used is dependent on constituent perspectives and expectations. Assessment of institutional effectiveness can and does take place at different levels (organizational, sub-unit, etc.). The Matrix of Domains uses the organizational level of analysis as it relates to NCA Criterion Four, "The institution can continue to accomplish its purposes and strengthen its educational effectiveness" (NCA, 1997, p.52).

(4) The time frame involved determines how data are measured. Some researchers have used the dynamic, or long-term (longitudinal), approach (Cameron, 1978). Most, however, use the static, or short-term approach to describe inputs, processes, and outcomes (Cameron, 1978). The Matrix of Domains views the static time frame as a point in time of the NCA self-study. However, certain longitudinal data can be reported.

(5) The types of data needed are related to perspectives and levels of analysis. Researchers have disagreed over whether to use only objective indicators, such as documents containing quantitative data (Mirvis, 1980), or perceptual indicators, such as surveys and focus group and individual interviews, by which to assess effectiveness (see Pennings, 1975, 1976; also Steers, 1977 as cited in Goodman, Pennings & associates, 1977). Others have indicated having used both (Cameron, 1978; Cameron & Smart, 1998). The elements in the Matrix of Domains indicate NCA's emphasis of

objective indicators, yet some perceptual indicators may help to demonstrate institutional effectiveness in each institution's model.

(6) The referent to be used by which to assess indicators is determined by the dominant constituency. As Cameron (1978) points out, each constituency's viewpoint affects the criteria used. He further states that referents can be comparative (between institutions), normative (against a standard), goal-centered (compared against a stated goal), or improvement evaluation (compared against past performance). Since the accrediting agency established Criterion Four and its indicators, the Matrix of Domains establishes the dominant referent as normative. However, since the Matrix of Domains includes NCA's Criterion One and GIR One (the institution's mission and purpose), an aspect of the referent is also goal-centered.

Analysis and Results

Using the six issues of Cameron (1980) as a framework, the Matrix of Domains resulted from analyzing the guideline statements in NCA's Criterion Four and six of the 24 General Institutional Requirements (GIRs). The NCA documents included the Handbook of Accreditation, 1994-1996 (NCA, 1994), which contained Criterion Four and the 24 GIRs. Another document was the "Working Draft: Revised Sections of the Handbook of Accreditation: Criteria Three and Four" (NCA, 1996), which was approved by NCA at its 1996 annual meeting. The most recent document was Handbook of Accreditation, Second Edition, 1997. For the purposes of creating this current Matrix, these documents stand as the most recent ones containing Criterion Four. The Matrix will need to undergo modifications whenever NCA revises any related aspects of Criterion Four, Criterion Three, Criterion One, and/or the GIRs.

Using the perspectives and criteria of the normative constituent (NCA), the author created descriptors for the major domains as indicated by subject heading in Criterion Four (Cameron, 1980). The results of applying these descriptors to areas in the matrix led the author to identify five major categories involving six GIRs as directly applicable to the other domains derived from Criterion Four. When completed, the author removed the GIRs that were not directly applicable to Criterion Four and re-configured the matrix. This revised matrix now included descriptors created by domains of activities in Criterion Four and a domain created by those GIRs that directly applied to the other domains (see Table1).

Analysis of the first domain, the five major categories that included six specific GIRs, showed that NCA requires the institution to have a clearly stated mission and an executive officer providing leadership for the institution in attempting to achieve its mission. NCA also requires the faculty to play a major role in the development and evaluation of all educational programs and that these degree programs directly associate with the institution's mission. The final two GIRs related to this domain require the institution to integrate budget allocations to effectively support the educational programs that accomplish the stated mission of the institution. Thus, the first domain is "NCA General Institutional Requirements Related to This Criterion." Analysis of the domains of Criterion Four found that, from NCA's perspective, one domain involves the institution having met the requirements of Criterion One ("The institution has clear and publicly stated purposes consistent with its mission and appropriate to an institution of higher education.") and Criterion Three ("The institution is accomplishing its educational and other purposes.") as a pre-requisite of meeting the

Table1. Matrix of Domains Created From NCA's Criterion Four and Related GIRs

NCA General Institutional Requirements (GIRs)	**Other Required NCA Criteria Supporting This Criterion**	**Activities Required by NCA to Support Educational Effectiveness**	**Pattern of Evidence Supporting This Criterion**
Mission 1.Mission statement	Criterion One to be met	1. Planning for educational improvement	Planning process/ Plans as well as ongoing effective planning processes
Governance 7. Executive officer provides leadership for institution		2. Building on Assessment	Structured assessment processes
Faculty 11. Significant role in dev. and eval. of all educ. programs	Criterion Three to be met		
Educational Program 14. Degree programs compatible with institution's mission			
Finances 20. Demonstrate appropriate use of resources to support programs		3. Growing from the self-study process (corresponding allocation of resources)	Current resource base that positions the institution for the future/ Resources organized and allocated to support its plans
21. Practices, records & reports demonstrate fiscal viability			

requirements of Criterion Four (NCA, 1997, p. 52). Meeting these two criteria directly related to a domain of activity derived from part of the criterion statement, "Institution can continue to accomplish its purpose." Consequently, the second domain to be established is "Other Required NCA Criteria Supporting This Criterion."

The third domain of activity in the Matrix that is created comes from the remaining part of the criterion statement, "Institution can strengthen its educational effectiveness." This domain includes three areas for activities: (1) "Planning for educational improvement," (2) "Building on assessment," and (3) "Growing from the self-study process" (NCA, 1997, p. 53). The key factor that NCA requires in the first area is an effective planning process, which includes involving representatives from all constituencies, scanning internal and external factors affecting the institution, updating an annual document used by the institution, and presenting accomplishments and obstacles/changes reached through adjusting prior annual planning (NCA, 1996). North Central Association requires the following key factors in the second and third areas of activities, "Building on assessment," and "Growing from the self-study":

- the governing board supports assessment
- senior executive officers provide leadership and support assessment
- sufficient resources are allocated to sustain ongoing assessment efforts
- funds are available to support changes that need to be made to enhance student academic achievement
- all planning and budgeting processes include ways in which assessment information can influence institutional priorities

(NCA, 1997, p. 53).

Consequently, the third domain to be used is "Activities Required by NCA to Support Educational Effectiveness."

The final domain of activity, "Patterns of Evidence Supporting This Criterion," involves the breadth of review that NCA requires an institution to include for successful completion of Criterion Four (NCA, 1997, p. 55). These patterns include, but are not restricted to, the following: (1) a fiscal, physical, and human resource base from which to position the college for the future, (2) tested decision-making processes to respond

to external and internal changes, (3) assessment processes that include different internal constituencies and report useful information to those constituencies and the planning process itself, (4) ongoing planning process, and (5) resource allocation focused to support the institution and programs (NCA, 1997).

Keeping in mind the constituencies' perspectives (issue 2) and levels of analyses (issue 3) of Cameron (1980), the institutions need to demonstrate a continuous assessment cycle that involves various internal constituencies, especially faculty, and includes feedback of useful information to a variety of internal and external constituencies: faculty, administration, students, governing board, and community. NCA requires indicators related to reporting the results of the assessment process in institutions' models to demonstrate (1) leadership stability at all levels (board, faculty, administration), (2) human, physical, and fiscal stability, (3) responsive governance structure and processes, and (4) continuous institutional assessment and planning activities (NCA, 1997).

Conclusions and Implications

Institutions should be able to use this matrix to assess the degree to which their institutions match the elements required in Criterion Four. The results of their assessment could be useful in completing their self-study.

Early analysis of the degree to which each element matches North Central Association's domains should allow institutions the time to clarify and demonstrate their activities in relation to these domains. The institution can also identify its strengths and areas of improvement. If serious gaps or low degrees of match occur, an institution may need to determine whether certain domains of activity rank differently in importance with NCA or the existence of varying degrees of match in the elements are acceptable, with the understanding that these elements are future areas for improvement.

By extrapolating the use of Cameron's six issues and the methodology for creating this matrix, institutions should be able to create similar matrices for most, if not all, of the remaining criteria needed to be completed in their self-study.

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